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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBURGEOIS, DBENZE AND  
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER  
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC  
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria, Hamas, US Policy (2/23)

¶1. Summary: All Syrian papers reported an official Syrian statement condemning the attacks on the Shiite mausoleum and Sunni mosques in Iraq. Eid Abu Sekke opined in Al-Ba'th that the U.S. and its allies are not happy with the election of Hamas and are against democratic changes in the region when the outcome does not suit their objectives.

Ezeddin al-Darwish editorialized in Tishreen that Secretary Rice is in the region to market a plan to besiege the new Palestinian government because it will not turn a blind eye to Israeli occupation and aggressive policies.

End summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"Syria condemns the attacks and calls on Iraqis to rise above the attempts at sedition; destruction of the dome of Imam Ali al-Hadi's Mausoleum unleashes a series of assassinations and attacks on 29 mosques; As-Sadr calls for the departure of occupation forces from Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/23)

"Official Source: Syria condemns terrorist actions against mausoleums and mosques in Iraq" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/23)

"The Syrian-Iranian Higher Committee discusses horizons of cooperation and development: Rejection of the policy of intervention and custodianship." (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/23)

"Tens of victims in terrorist attacks in Baghdad." (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 2/22)

"[Lebanese] forces and personalities reject replacement of President Lahoud. [Omar] Karami: Where do they want to take Lebanon? [Michael] Oun: There is no alternative to national dialogue." (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/23)

"President Asad receives [Qatari F.M.] Sheikh Hamad: Syria and Qatar are concerned for the security and stability of the region." (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/23)

### 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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" Hamas and the West Favorite Game "

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Dr. Eid Abu Sekke, a columnist in government-owned Al-Ba'th, commented (2/22): "We have reached a time when birds are accused of harassing crows and eagles, and butterflies of spreading terrorism in the woods and over the prairies! A month after the success of Hamas in the Palestinian elections and days after the naming of a candidate to head the cabinet, Tel Aviv and all its allies in the "civilized democratic" West and in the romantic East still can't believe the outcome and feel that it is a nightmare from which they will awaken.

"Officials in Tel Aviv and Washington and their chorus know well that the peace process has been at a complete standstill, thanks to them, for over five years.

"The most important democratic achievement is change of power through the ballot box, allowing people to choose those whose programs and ideas match their ambitions and aspirations for the future.

"Therefore, the people of the West, especially in Washington, should continue to believe this, even if it embarrasses those who classify organizations, parties and states according to their whim...and those who ask Hamas to turn its back on the slogans and objectives which played a major role in bringing it to power. Those who elected Hamas...did so because, out of excessive exasperation and abundant hope, they want the choice of resistance to go hand in hand with political action. Also, the recent Palestinian vote was as much for economic as political development, as everyone was aware of the bureaucracy of corruption within the Palestinian Authority.

"Finally, isn't democracy which is manifested in a peaceful change of power the West's favorite game?, Why don't they like it when we play this game on our own turf?"

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"This is the Arab State of Affairs"

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Ezzedin al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (2/23): "In Palestine, they are not content with occupation and killing of Arab citizens, and the support these killings get, especially from the U.S. They now want Palestinian legislative and executive authorities to turn a blind eye to Israeli occupation and aggressive policies, otherwise it will be a 'terrorist' authority that should be fought militarily, financially and politically. What Condoleeza Rice is trying to market in the region is absolute proof of this."

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